

MAYOR'S COMMITTEE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

APRIL 22, 2009

MINUTES – Meeting in Newton City Hall – Cafeteria

PRESENT: Jane Brown, Lucie Chansky, Jini Fairley, Jason Rosenberg
REGRETS: Rob Caruso (Co-Chair), Rosemary Larking, Barbara Lischinsky, Girard Plante (Co-Chair), Heather Platt
STAFF: Beverly Droz (Human & Vol. Services) Kathleen Cahill (Planning & Dev.)
GUESTS: Rhoda Davidson, Lisa Davidson, Carol Schein

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The meeting was called to order at 6:40pm and chaired by Jason Rosenberg.

Bev made announcements that due to unforeseen personal situations, many of the Committee members had to send their sincere regrets for being unable to be present.

MINUTES

Although minutes of the March 16 meeting had been emailed previously, Bev handed out revised minutes, thanking Kathleen for her corrections to them. Kathleen explained the corrections, which helped clarify areas in the CDBG report.

A motion was made by Jane and seconded by Jini to accept the revised minutes from the March 16 meeting and the motion passed unanimously.

Introductions were made and guests were welcomed.

CONSOLIDATION PLAN – Kathleen Cahill

The Consolidated Plan is a five-year plan that established priorities for the expenditure of CDBG funds. The current Consolidated Plan covers FY06-FY10. The Planning Department has begun the process for the next Consolidated Plan which will cover FY11-FY15. As part of this process, access needs are evaluated and priorities are established based on these needs. Priorities often include actual projects and the MCPD is therefore reviewing some of the proposed projects. It takes several meeting to go through this process since we have different departments attending to present the proposed projects.

Tonight we welcomed Carol Schein from the Parks & Recreation Dept. who presented the following:

The top priority for the Parks & Recreation Dept. is **Newton Centre Playground**, a 17-acre park (one end at Mason-Rice on Pleasant Street and the other end at Centre Street) for which the Parks & Recreation Dept. has developed a full access plan. The park, originally designed by F.L. Olmsted, thus far has an accessible playground in the middle with a path from Mason-Rice Elementary School to the park. An accessible route from Bowen Street would allow people to walk through the entire park. The Parks and Recreation Department has \$17,500 to put toward this project but roughly \$40,000 is required. Also needed is an accessible route from Centre Street that will hook into the pathway network. This will allow a person in a wheelchair to go from Centre Street to Mason-Rice School. Also, an accessible pathway with accessible parking from Homer Street remains to be done. All existing asphalt paths are in poor shape and the Hut

Recreation Facility on Tyler Terrace is not accessible. Accessible parking on Tyler Terrace needs to be addressed as well.

The second priority discussed by Carol is **Cold Spring Park**. “New Cold Spring Park” has citywide usage for tennis, basketball, soccer, softball and lacrosse. A total of 17 days a year the Farmers’ Market is located in the Park and it can draw 1,000 people over the course of a day. This area should be made accessible to ease the vehicular pedestrian conflicts. Currently there are no pathways along the parking lot nor are there paths through or around the fields making the facilities inaccessible. The City has designed a pathway network for this area which is to be implemented in three phases. The MCPD recently approved \$35,000 for Phase I. Phase I includes an accessible route with two handicapped parking spaces that will run along the grassy field side of the tennis courts and then turn a right angle toward the Farmers Market area. The next step is to obtain funding for the second and/or third phase(s) of the project.

The third priority of the Parks & Recreation Dept. is **Burr Park** in Newton Corner between Park Street and Waverly Avenue and across from Bigelow School. This park is open city-wide, but Bigelow Middle School, a preschool, and summer camps are all frequent users. The park contains a basketball, tennis, and baseball field, and playground equipment. Recent accessibility improvements include: the improvement of pedestrian access conditions from the Park Street side and the driveway, turnaround, and parking area on Waverley Avenue. Handicapped Accessible parking on Park Street and an accessible route from the Waverley Avenue sidewalk into the park are still needed.

The Committee then reviewed the other parks in various Wards from Ward 1 to Ward 8.

Jason discussed the top priority for Ward 3, **Richard J. McGrath Park** (*a.k.a.*, Warren Playfields) at the Warren House, 1600 Washington Street in West Newton (Ward 3). This park is not accessible, as there are no pathways. It is a large 10-1 acre active park with an adjacent parking area that would benefit from a master access plan. The park ranks high due to the adjacent housing facility, which includes housing for the elderly and people with disabilities. This flat park would also get a lot of bang out of the CDBG buck because it is flat.

Next Jini discussed the **Weeks Field Playground** at Locksley Road in Newton Centre (Ward 6) which is also relatively flat but inaccessible since there are no pathways. The new accessible tot lot would benefit from a short accessible route from the parking area. The park is adjacent from a housing facility, which includes housing for the elderly and people with disabilities. Currently accessing the fields and benches is difficult because of the uneven grass. The athletic fields in this park are heavily used and Newton South high school students use these fields when their fields are unavailable.

The Committee agreed that both of these two projects would be cost efficient because they do not require much grading.

Next was discussion about the **Crystal Lake** plan, 16 Rogers Street in Newton Highlands (Ward 6), which was presented previously to MCPD. Carol said that some funding may be available for the bathhouse. A master Plan to address access needs is currently in the works for the bathhouse site, the adjacent park site at Rogers St., the newly acquired portion of 230 Lake Avenue and the new soon-to-be-installed accessible path to run along the shore-side easement to connect up with Livingston Cove. It is unclear what the final master plan will look like until it is approved. If

access funds are needed for the implementation of this master plan, the Mayor's Committee may consider amending the 5-year Consolidated Plan.

- Bev relayed input from Barbara Lischinsky that it is important to give solid consideration to parks and playgrounds close to public transportation.
- Kathleen brought a large map of Newton so attendees could view the parklands.
- Jason suggested that the two parks discussed, Richard McGrath Park and Weeks Field, be considered for addition to the prioritization list. **Members agreed.**

Request to Present Needs

Guests Rhoda Davidson and Lisa Davidson:

Rhoda stated Lisa is disabled but can live independently. However, Lisa has difficulty taking public transportation. Rhoda checked with the Department of Senior Services to see if Lisa could receive their taxi vouchers; they declined. When these vouchers originally were given to seniors from the Human Services Department, Rhoda claims Lisa was given some. Rhoda wrote a letter to Mike Kruse, Commissioner of the Planning Department, detailing that the City should have a transportation plan for its disabled residents. Rhoda conducted independent research and found out that the City of Cambridge has a program; she has forwarded this information to Mr. Kruse. Cambridge has a taxi service for the disabled that may be used for medical purposes or general activities. Rhoda suggested that Newton adopt a similar program and/or piggyback on the senior's program. Proof of eligibility should be required.

Rhoda made a second proposal that the Meals on Wheels program should also be for the disabled. This program would benefit the disabled who are living independently but falling through the cracks and in need of services. Again, proof of eligibility would be required.

Lucie stated that this may open up a Pandora's Box because there are hundreds of people with disabilities in Newton. The City does not have the agency power or the financial resources to meet all of the needs. Rhoda disputed this and spoke to those individuals in need. Cambridge statistics showed much fewer persons with disabilities than seniors use these services. Jason noted that we have to look at this as a practical matter.

Bev made note that the City of Cambridge is unique in our state: their Human Services Department has over 200 employees and they were originally set-up in a manner to have and provide many diverse services. Bev also stated that the Meals on Wheels program is part of Springwell, the former West Suburban Elder Services agencies. They depend on volunteers to deliver the meals to seniors and they advertise their program with Bev's Office for Volunteer Services because, like other agencies, they are always in need of volunteers to help make their programs happen. It would be up to Springwell to determine how to enlarge this program to also meet the needs of the disabled in the communities that they service.

Jini stated she works for the Center for Independent Living and takes The Ride, which she says has improved greatly. She also detailed the Meals on Wheels program, a federal program for the elderly who are homebound and cannot get to a senior center to get a meal. It is very specific in nature. She said in terms of transportation, there are two options for medical taxis: The Ride and Mass Health transportation. If you are on Mass Health, you can get free medical transportation as part of your Mass Health benefit. She gave further details about having no difficulties using The Ride daily for work and medical appointments. Rhoda felt The Ride was unreliable.

Lucie said there are places that prepare food (e.g., Roche Brothers) and deliver it, and you can pay in food stamps. Lisa pointed out that you have to have a very low income to qualify for food stamps.

Rhoda asked if Beverly could network with others agencies and departments, for example the community social worker Ana Gonzalez, to get more information. Bev stated that she works with Ana – they are the 2 staff people that comprise the City’s Human & Volunteer Services Division. Bev is involved with networking with agencies and departments, and certainly open to exploring feasible ways for these ideas to come to fruition. She noted these difficult economic times make it harder for more services to be added.

Jason thanked the guests and noted that all of this can be a benefit to the committee and the public at large.

CDBG ACCESS PROJECTS REPORT

This report was submitted to MCPD by email before this meeting for their review. Per usual it is copied here within the minutes. Kathleen Cahill presented the report. Comments are noted after each project.

Accessible Pedestrian Signals (Project CD0703C. Expended, \$7,818; Budget balance: \$11,995). The installation of APS-10 audible pedestrian signals at the intersections of Walnut and Cabot and Beacon and Chestnut, Commonwealth Avenue by St. Ignatius and Beacon and Hammond St. near McElroy Commons was completed in November. Centre St. and Centre Ave. is a priority intersection; however that is on-hold until pending a final decision by the Newton Corner Advisory Committee on VHB conceptual plans. Washington St. and Commonwealth Ave. is another priority intersection. A list of improvements funded with traffic mitigation funds have not be released. Other priority locations submitted to traffic engineering include: Washington and Beacon as well as Washington Street by Newton-Wellesley Hospital. The City’s contract with Republic ITS is currently expired and awaiting renewal.

Discussion: No news on APS except that Clint, Kathleen, Heather, and two students made a site visit. Clint will make a temporary change at Walnut and Commonwealth Ave. as a trial to see how it might work at Centre and Beacon Street. Kathleen described what it was like at Centre and Beacon Streets and how angry drivers got. The left arrows should show green and red, so drivers know they cannot make a turn. At the time, Clint noted that this would back up traffic. Jason suggested using traffic police when an intersection is this dangerous.

Charlesbank Playground (Project CD0903C. Expended: \$0 Budget balance, \$30,000). Project includes the installation of a ramped concrete walkway with metal handrails, designed to complement new play equipment, benches, and picnic tables and allow access through the park.

Discussion: Kathleen said we got stimulus funds but politics got involved, and the Stearns Playground and the Joanne Pellegrini Playground in Ward 1 have become the priority. Jini said that the Newton Corner Advisory Committee had approximately \$150,000 in funds and spent it on everything but not necessarily on accessible things. Kathleen said that approximately \$50,000 of the \$600,000 CDBG is for access and will be spent on an accessible path at Nahanton and on the second phase of Cold Spring Park. She said the other \$560,000 will be used on Stearns and Pellegrini parks. We all agreed that both parks will be fully accessible then.

*Jini made a **motion** and Jane seconded to send a letter to the Mayor, the Board of Aldermen, and the Planning Department saying that since at this time we are given up to 7 percent of stimulus funds, we remind and encourage the Aldermen and the Mayor to remember to integrate accessibility of stimulus-funded projects. The **motion passed**.*

Kathleen reported that they were asked to list shovel ready projects for the Planning Board meeting on May 4, 2009. The deadline set by HUD is May 18, 2009, but the HUD regulations are not yet available. Jason said that we have to get the subcommittee to sit with the Parks and Recreation Department to formulate a plan. Kathleen said that the Planning and Development Dept., Parks and Recreation Dept., and Department of Public Works will meet on either April 24, 2009 or April 30, 2009 to discuss.

Jini expressed a concern that in the rush to spend HUD funds in lieu of timelines, accessibility will be overlooked.

Curb Cuts (Project CD0903G, Expended \$48,879 Budget balance, \$42,255). Funds were used to complete the following curb cuts: Auburn and Washington (4/widening of island) Mason-Rice (6), Temple and Myrtle (2), JFK Circle (2). Committee earmarked remaining funds for curb cuts on Everett and Gibbs and Sumner and Gibbs in Newton Centre. Construction on these curb cuts will begin this spring.

Retrofitting Curb Cuts (Project CD0903E, Budget balance, \$6,000). A list of 7 locations (Homer Street, Beacon St. @ Dalton, Centre Green @ Langley, 1188 Centre Green, 82 Lincoln Street, 100 Walnut Street, 28 Commonwealth St) (19 curb cuts) have been identified by committee members and staff. Project 100%; awaiting labor and material bills.

Discussion: Retrofitting Curb Cuts are complete but Kathleen hopes to get out and visit them.

OTHER BUSINESS:

HP Parking

Bev read the brief HP application from Alderman Lennon for a residential HP street space in front of 17 Murphy Court. Rob, Jason, Lucie, and Jini have all visited the site. Jason handed out aerial photos of the street of homes on Adams Street and Murphy Court that are business zoned. Each house has a driveway, including 17 Murphy Court. The issue is that it is less distance to walk to the driveway than to the street. The Committee needs to know why a street HP space is needed compared to an existing driveway. The Committee also needs to know if the person has a HP placard and whether he/she needs a vehicle with a lift. MCPD would like to be helpful but needs more information. For now, this item is tabled.

There was a brief discussion about how the Aldermen are allowed to file requests and provide such very little information. Jason will write an e-mail to Linda Finucane in the Clerk's office. Bev will notify David Koses about our comments.

Discussion of Guests' Presentation

Members briefly discussed the 2 proposed ideas presented by the guests. We felt that we provided them information about the current situation and realistically there is not much more we can do. We don't have the resources to go to other agencies and discuss what they might take on.

Annual CDBG week 4/13/2009

Jane attended the April 13 event at the Coletti-Magni Park and reported that approximately 50 people were in attendance, and it was a good meeting. She was surprised by the number of police that were present.

Our Committee

We discussed the size of the committee, which is currently at nine members. Jini recently spoke to the Watertown Handicap Commission. She was astonished to learn the size their budget and what they can do because of it. Their budget comes from parking fine collections. They are doing creative access things. It was noted that Framingham films their meetings. We know that Brookline also has full-time staffing. We may want to give consideration to being in touch with Mayoral candidates to remind them of accessibility issues and other concerns.

A motion passed to adjourn at 8:55 pm.

The next meeting will be on Monday, May 18 at 6:30pm.

Respectfully submitted by Bev Droz